

Dear Mr. Speaker:

Swift, secure and dependable communication between the Department of State and American diplomatic and consular posts abroad is essential to the conduct of United States foreign policy. This fact increasingly is true due to the accelerating pace of international negotiations and our need to obtain multilateral solutions to foreign policy problems. Many posts abroad now must rely upon commercial telegraph facilities, usually controlled by local governments which often are communist dominated. In addition to the difficulties thus encountered in daily operations, internal uprisings and disruptions of international relationships frequently interrupt these commercial facilities at the very time our communication needs are most acute.

The most satisfactory solution to this problem is use of radio transmitters located in our missions abroad. We are severely restricted in the use of such facilities because the Communications Act of 1934 does not permit granting of reciprocal privileges to foreign governments. The Communications Act provides that aliens and representatives of foreign governments may not be licensed to operate radio transmitting stations in the United States. Consequently, many governments will not permit us to operate radio transmitters in their countries.

Principal considerations opposing the granting of reciprocal radio transmitting privileges to representatives of foreign governments in the United States are:

1. Potential loss of revenue to American carriers.
2. Facilitation of transmission of intelligence from the United States by foreign governments.
3. Frequency and interference problems for other radio services in the United States.

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The Honorable

John W. McCormack,  
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

State Department review completed

There is considerable evidence to indicate that the advantages to be realized by this government in operating its own radio transmitters abroad materially outweigh the possible disadvantages. Pending this in order, it does not appear that American carriers would suffer significant losses of revenue. The amount of business diverted from American carriers would be small as limitations on power, operating hours and frequencies of foreign government operated transmitters would not permit diversion of a large volume of traffic.

As to intelligence considerations, the use of diplomatic radio facilities can be interpreted merely as a modern extension of the time-honored privileges of the diplomatic pouch. The pouch normally enjoys complete immunity from inspection and, with present international schedules, offers a very rapid channel for transmission of potentially unlimited quantities of intelligence material. The foreign missions have open access to international telegraph service and in some instances are in position even to lease international radio or cable channels from the carriers and thus gain all the advantages of speed through direct telegraphic transmission. Additionally, it is contemplated that a bilateral agreement would be negotiated with a foreign government only after it has been carefully determined that a net gain would accrue to the United States.

While there are frequency and interference problems, with the low power permitted and the low volume intermittent transmission to be expected, they are not insurmountable. This is confirmed by the fact that such stations are operated extensively throughout the rest of the world without any serious complication.

I believe that it is in the national interest to amend Section 305 of the Communications Act of 1934 to permit granting of reciprocal privileges to selected foreign governments for operation of radio transmitters in their missions in the United States when in the opinion of the President such action is warranted. A draft of the proposed amendment is enclosed.

CLEARANCES: OPR - Mr. Ford

L/A - Mr. Lysterly

A - Mr. Crockett

TMC - Mr. Lebel

A:OPR:HJYcc:amc  
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